The Clash between Pagans and Christians: The Baltic Crusades from 1147-1309

Honors Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation
with honors research distinction in History in the
undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Donald R. Shumaker

The Ohio State University
May 2014

Project Advisor: Professor Heather J. Tanner, Department of History

The Baltic Crusades started during the Second Crusade (1147-1149), but continued into the fifteenth century. Unlike the crusades in the Holy Lands, the Baltic Crusades were implemented in order to combat the pagan tribes in the Baltic. These crusades were generally conducted by German and Danish nobles (with occasional assistance from Sweden) instead of contingents from England and France. Although the Baltic Crusades occurred in many different countries and over several centuries, they occurred as a result of common root causes. For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on the northern crusades between 1147 and 1309. In 1309 the Teutonic Order, the monastic order that led these crusades, moved their headquarters from Venice, where the Order focused on reclaiming the Holy Lands, to Marienberg, which was on the frontier of the Baltic Crusades. This signified a change in the importance of the Baltic Crusades and the motivations of the crusaders. The Baltic Crusades became the main theater of the Teutonic Order and local crusaders, and many of the causes for going on a crusade changed at this time due to this new focus. Prior to the year 1310 the Baltic Crusades occurred for several reasons. A changing knightly ethos combined with heightened religious zeal and the evolution of institutional and ideological changes in just warfare and forced conversions were crucial in the development of the Baltic Crusades. However, the initial cause stemmed from economic concerns rather than religious motivations of the northern nobles. The Baltic Crusades continued and were spearheaded by the Teutonic Order spearheaded in response to the tumultuous politics and ongoing power struggle within the Holy Roman Empire.

Fifty years after the First Crusade landed in the Holy Lands, the Baltic Crusades started in 1147 with the Wendish Crusade which was conducted by the Danes. The Germans and Scandinavians defined the Wends as the westernmost Slavic tribes.[1] They inhabited the land

[1] Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1997, 27.

along the South of the Baltic Sea from the bay of Kiel to the Vistula.[2] The Wends consisted of several nations: the Wagrians, Abotrites, Polabians, Liutizians, Rugians and Pomeranians.[3] Many of the nations spoke different but similar languages, and operated independent of each other with the exception of the loosely united Abotrites and Polabians. From 1200-1292, the Danes campaigned against Finland, and two German monastic orders, the Swordbrothers and the Teutonic Order, rose to prominence and conducted crusades against the pagan Balts in the Livonian, Prussian, and Estonian Crusades. A priest founded the Swordbrothers in 1202 in the city of Riga with the express purpose of fighting the pagans in the Baltic.[4] The Teutonic Order was founded in Acre in 1190 to care for German crusaders, but they eventually took up a militant role in northern Europe.[5] The Balts, like the Wends, consisted of several nations divided into smaller tribes, which were the functioning political units.[6] The Prussian tribes lived between the Lower Vistula, the Narew, the Niemen, and the Baltic coast.[7] The Lithuanians were a combination of two tribes: the Zemaiciai (referred to as the Samogitians) and the Aukstaiciai, and they inhabited the land north and east of the Niemen.[8] North of the lower Dvina lived the Lettigallians, and the Semigallians and Selonians inhabited the land south of the river.[9] The Curonians lived on the peninsula between the Baltic and the Gulf of Riga and had a language similar to the Letts even though they interacted with the northern tribes more than the

---

[2] Refer to Appendix 1 for a map of the pagan tribes. Map provided by http://www.inspiritoo.com/the-republic-novgorod.html. A timeline of important events has also been provided. The timeline is based on Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, ix-xii with a few key additions and subtractions of my own.

[3] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades, 27*

[4] Henricus Lettus, *The Chronicle of Henry of* Livonia, trans. James A. Brundage. New York, Columbia University Press, 2003, 40.

[5] William Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*: *A Military History*. South Yorkshire: Pen &Sword Books Ltd.,2011.9

[6] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 37

[7] Ibid. 36-37

[8] Ibid. 37

[9] Ibid. 36

neighboring Letts did, and they adopted significant parts of the northern cultures.[10] North of the Curonians, the Estonians inhabited the highlands and southern coast of the Finnish Gulf while the Livs occupied the land around the mouth of the Dvina.[11] Another tribe, the Vods, lived at the head of the Gulf of Finland between Novgorod and the river Narva.[12] North of the Gulf lived the northernmost tribes consisting of four Fennic groups that were collectively called the Finns by Western sources.[13] The most notable of the Fennic tribes was the Karelians, and they lived directly north of the Vods.

Before the Wendish Crusade began several key ideological and institutional changes took place in the previous century that allowed the crusades against the pagans to occur. One of these changes was the cultural shift whereby nobles were drawn to fighting the enemies of Christ. For example, religious reforms such as the Truce and Peace of God enabled the crusades against the Muslims to occur, and subsequently the pagans in the Baltic.[14] The Truce of God was an attempt to curb the violence between Christian nations, and established a precedent of the Church getting involved in warfare. From a Truce of God proclamation in Cologne Germany (1083),

> If anyone attempts to oppose this pious institution and is unwilling to promise peace to God…or to observe it, no priest in our diocese shall presume to say a mass for him or shall take an care for his salvation; if he is sick, no Christian shall dare to visit him; on his deathbed he shall not receive the Eucharist, unless he repents.[15]

Furthermore, the Church stated anyone who violated the peace would be excommunicated. A knight's eternal soul was jeopardized if he violated the peace the Church proposed. The Church gained some influence on how warfare was conducted through the Peace and Truce of God

[10] Ibid. 37
[11] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 40
[12] Ibid, 41
[13] Ibid
[14] James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, Philadelphia, 1986, 20.
[15] "Declaration of the Truce of God," in *The Crusades,* ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010, 30-31.

movement and how it connected to the new knightly ethos. Knights were quickly embracing the poetic notion of fighting evil, and at the same time the Church was issuing reforms to try and reduce the infighting. The concern for one's soul made it more important for a noble to obey the Church, so when the Church decided the Muslims or pagans should be fought for the sake of Christianity the nobility were much more likely to join the Crusade. In one instance Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1220-1250), promised to go on a crusade, but he kept delaying his departure, and eventually the papacy grew impatient and excommunicated him. These reforms demonstrate key changes that were vital in the Baltic Crusades.

A changing knightly ethos further contributed to the crusading movement. *The Song of Roland* was about the conquests of Charlemagne in the eighth century, but it reveals how the nobles of the eleventh century were embracing these poetic deeds (the tale was written down in the eleventh century). First, it depicted how an ideal knight should act. "Count Roland (the hero in the tale) never loved the cowardly, or the proud, or the wicked, or any knight who was not a good vassal."[16] Crusaders, especially knights in the military orders, were supposed to be humble, and this quotation shows a rejection of pride.[17] Furthermore, there is a denunciation of cowardice and wickedness in general, and those aspects carried over into the Crusades. Roland is portrayed as a nearly invincible knight, and the only reasons he is not able to completely defeat the Muslims as they flee to Spain is his horse was killed, and he is left on foot. This tale conveyed a highly romanticized image of what a knight could and should be. A knight engaged foes who were intrinsically evil. Furthermore, knights were valiant defenders of Christendom. Moreover,

[16] "The Song of Roland," in *The Crusades*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, (University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), 25-28.

[17] This is apparent in the rules each military order instituted. Knights in the orders were instructed to be obedient and humble among many other things. This aspect will be explored further when the Teutonic Order develops in the Holy Lands.

when Count Roland died at the end of the tale he was escorted to paradise, so fighting against the Muslims was seen as an honor with a distinct religious reward. This new mindset held by the nobility in Europe helped foster the crusading movement that emerged in 1095.

Contemporary sources are skewed in the favor of the Christian kingdoms because the clergy provides most of the contemporary sources, so the pagan tribes are seldom represented. However, many sources are still useful when studying the Baltic Crusades. First, letters and treatises written by the clergy such as *In Praise of the New Knighthood* by Bernard of Clairvaux provide insight into the changing mores and concerns of the Christian kingdoms.[18] Second, papal and imperial bulls provide another lens. Papal bulls reveal why crusades were called and what the moral justifications for crusading were, and imperial bulls allow the religious and political values of imperial Germany to be evaluated. Finally, the most important source for studying the Baltic Crusades is chronicles. *The Chronicle of the Slavs* was written by the priest Helmold of Bosau between 1167 and 1172 and served as a history of the Christianization of the Slavs. Helmold's chronicles shows early interactions between the pagans and Christians, and it shows the perceived problems of the first crusades in the Baltic. A Catholic priest, Henry, wrote *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, an indispensible document for this time period as it reveals much of the religious and political motivations from the years 1180-1226. The *Livländische Reimchronik* covers 1180-1290 and was written from the perspective of a crusading knight; however, the author remained anonymous. The chronicle romanticized the crusades and served

[18] Bernard of Clairvaux was instrumental in the Baltic Crusades. Bernard was an abbot in the Cistercian Order, and he helped preach the crusades.

as a recruitment piece, so it reveals the cultural values of the time.[19] Combined these sources provide a glimpse into the minds and actions of Christians during the Baltic Crusades.

The Baltic Crusades saw many ideological, institutional, and political shifts, but the events are seldom discussed. This lack of discussion stems from several sources; one; it is a controversial topic in the national histories of the Christianized countries; two, the effects seem marginal to many Americans; and three, the source material can be hard to find in English. However, the Baltic Crusades have been widely explored by German and Baltic historians. This is a divisive issue in the region, and many people still feel resentment about these Crusades; as a result they have no qualms writing partisan accounts to further their agenda.[20] This drowns out the reliable historians who are trying to assess the Crusades from a non-nationalistic viewpoint. The preconceived notions of the Crusade and nationalistic biases are addressed by the English speaking authority on the Baltic Crusades, William Urban, in his article "Victims of the Baltic Crusade."[21] Many assume the pagan tribes were all victims of foreign invaders and frequently compare the Baltic Crusades to the conquest of North America by Europeans. Some have advanced this argument of victimhood purely for political reasons, so what actually happened is distorted. The biggest problem with this pervasive mindset is when the pagan tribes are viewed purely as victims their agency is devalued, and that was not the case. The Baltic Crusades consisted of winners and losers, and many of the pagan tribes were winners such as the Letts and

[19] This study will not focus on the Livländische Reimchronik because I could only find German copies of the text until the very end of my study. However, the chronicle is frequently used by historians of the Baltic Crusades, so it cannot be ignored either. Many of the sources used in this study utilize this document, so it is indirectly involved in the arguments presented. Although it was not essential for my study, *The Chronicle of Novgorod* provides the Greek Orthodox perspective of the conflict.

[20] William Urban, "Victims of the Baltic Crusade," http://department.monm.edu/history/urban/articles/VictimsBalticCrusade.htm. Talks about this topic in much greater detail.

[21] Ibid.

Livs.[22] The Letts and Livs were weak and subjugated to stronger pagan tribes, but they increased their power through military and financial support from the Crusaders. Many of the traditionally strong tribes waned in power as a result. The pagan tribes had traditional enemies, and the arrival of the Crusaders provided another tool to use against them in their ongoing power struggle, and the tribes that capitalized on this opportunity fared well.[23] The cultural challenge for historians of the Baltic Crusades is not falling into the preconceived notions of victimhood. One must remember every group involved was fighting to win. As much as the Crusaders were spreading Christianity and their political organization, the pagan tribes were using these Crusaders to defeat their rivals.

The complex nature of the Baltic Crusades is being evaluated by an increasing number of historians. The Baltic Crusades were on the Crusades in the Holy Lands, so many books discuss the Baltic Crusades as a side note to the Crusades to the Holy Lands such as *Anatomy of a Crusade: 1213-1221* by James M. Powell. This book explores how the Crusades were organized, funded, and the Germans' involvement in the Crusades in the Holy Lands. First, Powell argues family was important in the crusades, and family members usually went on crusades together, and bishops encouraged their own natal families to go on a crusade.[24] Powell argues the Fifth Crusade failed because it did not bring all of the Christian forces to bear at the same time. Crusades were challenging to implement because money was frequently a problem, and nobles would try going on crusades closer to home rather than in the Holy Lands.[25] Furthermore, conflicts sprang up frequently in Europe, and the Holy Roman Empire was one of the worst

[22] Ibid.
[23] Urban, "Victims of the Baltic Crusades."
[24] Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 82.
[25] Ibid. 93-94.

hotbeds. This exacerbated the problem as Emperor Frederick II was expected to lead the Fifth Crusade.

There have also been some influential general overviews written about the Baltic Crusades, and one of the most highly acclaimed modern works on the Baltic Crusades is *The Northern Crusades* by Eric Christiansen. Christiansen builds his argument from the premise that the subject is seldom studied in detail by English speakers, and as a result only the propaganda film *Alexander Nevsky* provides context for these campaigns[26]. Christiansen attempts to dispel any preconceived notions his readers may have from this film and to educate readers who have never heard of the Baltic Crusades. First, he explores what the natives of the region were like and how they were organized. Christiansen argues the native pagans were constantly interacting and competing with the Christian kingdoms (chiefly Denmark and Germany) for territory and trade.[27] Competition was the spark that started the Baltic Crusades, and the Baltic Crusades were primarily fought between long time rivals.[28] Christiansen contends the crusaders had religious motivations, and he argues Christians felt they had to physically defeat the pagans before they could truly convert.[29] He contends this need to physically defeat the pagans helped fuel the already tense relations between the pagans and the Christians. Very similar to this work is *The Baltic Crusades* by William Urban.[30] Urban advances a similar argument to Christiansen, but *The Baltic Crusades* is the source most historians refer to when discussing the Baltic Crusades.

---

[26] *Alexander Nevsky* directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein. Aired December 1, 1938. DVD. An award winning film made in 1938. It depicts the Russian prince, Alexander Nevsky, fighting off the invading Teutonic Knights. At the time tensions were increasing between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Despite their Non-Aggression Pact, the Germans were seen as increasingly expansionistic. The Germans also used Teutonic Knight imagery in their propaganda to depict themselves as holy warriors.

[27] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 43, 45-46

[28] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 49

[29] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 56

[30] William Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*. Chicago 1994.

Studies of the Teutonic Order are few in number, but *The Teutonic Knights: A Military History* by William Urban follows the Teutonic Order from its inception to its eventual demise in the fifteenth century. Urban contends the Teutonic Order started out of an act of desperation.[31]He further contends many of the Order's actions were influenced by the failed excursion in Hungary, and future Grand Masters would seek guarantees before campaigning in Europe again.[32] This aspect of the Teutonic Order was further explored by Nicholas Morton when he argued the Teutonic Order's ability to appear neutral while actually favoring the Holy Roman Empire during the Ibelin-Lombard conflict reaped benefits for them.[33] They were able to gain land from both parties and served as a mediator between the groups, so their reputation grew. Marian Dygo takes Morton's argument a step further and argues Herman von Salza, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, was actually given allodial land by the Emperor and was therefore a subject of the Empire rather than the leader of an autonomous organization.[34] Dygo contends this is the reason Emperor Frederick II favored the Teutonic Order, and this favor is ultimately what led to them taking charge in the Baltic Crusades. The general consensus regarding the Teutonic Order is it was a dynamic organization that was influenced by the surrounding Christian kingdoms, and these interactions altered their policies and actions.

The organization and structure of the Teutonic Order, and monastic orders in general, were further studied by James W. Brodman. The Teutonic Order's military Rule was based on that of the Knights Templar, but they were primarily a hospitaller order similar to the Knights

---

[31] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 11.
[32] Ibid. 55-56.
[33] Morton, "The Teutonic Knights in the Ibelin-Lombard Conflict," 139-140
[34] Marian Dygo, "The German Empire and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order in the Light of the Golden Bull of Rimini," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 61, (1990): 33-61.

Hospitaller.[35] Brodman states the Order was founded to care for sick Germans in the Holy Lands, so they were not even initially a military order.[36] Rather than viewing themselves as primarily a fighting group they were hospitallers with a combat arm, and they continued to fulfill their hospitaller goals even after they acquired more territory and adopted a militant role. "Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders" by William Urban discusses how the Teutonic Order conducted internal matters and elected their leaders.[37] The process of selecting leaders relied on a massive gathering and election process, and that led to rivalries.[38] Furthermore, each Grand Master had a different vision, so the Order's goals changed frequently, and their actions would change as a result.[39]

One difficulty with studying the Baltic Crusades is much of the scholarship focuses on the Lithuanian Crusades because it is where the Teutonic Order met its demise. Scholars generally argue the Teutonic Order was the dominant force in the Baltic by 1309, and their main concern was self-justification and maintaining the flow of recruits. Paul Hardwick argues in "The Knightly Class of Europe and the Lithuanian Crusades" that the piety of the Teutonic Order reached new heights in the fourteenth century.[40] He argues the Order had to justify itself to the rest of Christendom because although the crusades to the Holy Lands were readily accepted, the crusades to the Baltic were often questioned.[41] Hardwick ends his argument by saying the

---

[35] James W. Brodman, "Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders," *The Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (July 2001), 388.
[36] Ibid. 388.
[37] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*. Delves into this topic more than any of his other works.
[38] Klaus Militzer, "From the Holy Lands to Prussia: the Teutonic Knights between Emperors and Popes and their Policies until 1309," in *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*, ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 73.
[39] Ibid.

[40] Paul Hardwick, "The Knightly Class of Europe and the Lithuanian Crusades," *Medieval Life: A New Magazine of the Middle Ages*, (1997).
[41] Ibid.

conversion of the Lithuanian monarchy doomed the Teutonic Order.[42] The Order no longer had a religious reason for maintaining its presence in the Baltic, so they became purely an economic and political entity by the late fourteenth century. Conversely, recruiting members to join the order or go on a crusade in the Baltic was always a challenge according to Stefan Vander Elst in "Chivalry, Crusade, and Romance on the Baltic Frontier." According to Elst it took until the middle of the fourteenth century to get a steady supply of troops flowing into the Baltic.[43] The Order had to utilize incentives to bring in recruits such as holding jousts, hunts, and hosting massive feasts for the crusading armies.[44] Furthermore, they drew on chivalry for motivation, and they changed the words in older chronicles to reflect the chivalric culture. For example, Christians killed in raids by pagan tribes were often depicted in the chronicles as genderless, but in the fourteenth century these same victims became women in the re-written chronicles.[45] According to Elst this was done to depict the victims as damsels in distress while the crusading knights were holy warriors trying to rescue them. Elst and Hardwick reflect the rising scholarly trend of trying to determine why the Teutonic Order was involved in the Baltic.

Another popular topic studied is the military strategy used by the Order in subjugating the tribes and securing the expanding border from incursions, and people defend their tactics as necessary or admonish them as too brutal. Urban the military strategy was harsh, but he does not view the Order's tactics as brutal.[46] In "The Organization and Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century," Urban argues their tactics were dictated by the pagan tribes' raiding parties. The Teutonic Order would either conquer or be given land to protect, and they would

---

[42] Ibid.
[43] Stefan Vander Elst, "Chivalry, Crusade, and Romance on the Baltic Frontier." *Mediaeval Studies* 73, (2012), 295.
[44] Vander Elst, "Chivalry, Crusade, and Romance on the Baltic Frontier," 296-297, 304
[45] Vander Elst, "Chivalry, Crusade, and Romance on the Baltic Frontier," 315-316
[46] William Urban's articles "Victims of the Baltic Crusade" and "The Organization and Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculem* 48, no. 3 (July 1973), *526* share this argument.

construct castles to serve as bases for patrols.[47] The Order was there to defend the newly acquired land, so their main concern was protecting what was part of Christendom until Crusading armies came to assist them in campaigns.[48] As a result a system of raids and counter-raids developed.[49] This style of fighting was typical of the time, so neither the pagans nor the Crusaders adopted new, brutal tactics. In "Victims of the Baltic Crusade," Urban builds on this concept by arguing the length of the time the wars of conquest took contributed to them being such cruel contests.[50] In addition, the Teutonic Order employed recent converts in its army, and they were frequently traditional enemies of the tribe currently being fought, so that made atrocities more likely from all parties.[51]

Studying the political complexities the Teutonic Order faced helped shape current trends, which have gone away from the Teutonic Order as simply being a benevolent or malevolent force in the Baltic, and what has emerged is a more complex narrative. This work fits into this emerging context, but it focuses on the period from 1147-1309, which is less frequently examined. The period has been re-examined to determine the root causes of the Baltic Crusades. Although Christiansen and Urban are largely in agreement, this project examines their key differences in greater detail. Like Christiansen I argue economics played a much greater role in this period of the crusading movement. Furthermore, like Urban I argue the Baltic Crusades were largely religiously motivated, but they originally started as an economic and political movement that gradually gained religious traction through zeal. Most importantly, these trends were fueled by the political tensions that existed within the Holy Roman Empire.

---

[47] Ibid
[48] Ibid., 525.
[49] Ibid.," 527.
[50] Urban, "Victims of the Baltic Crusade."
[51] Ibid.

The initial campaign against the Wends in 1147, although religiously approved and justified, was more for economic reasons.[52] The Wendish Crusade is unique in that the reason it developed was primarily economic, and there were several key factors. First, the economies of the pagan tribes (and to an extent the Danes) were built on trading and raiding. In the eleventh century, the Danish nobility started to rely more on raiding in the Baltic because it was economically more viable than trying to conquer land or raid in England.[53] An able administrator who could finance a trade ship or work his peasants could gain more profit than raiding in England.[54] Moreover; when Danish nobles invaded England they had to maintain larger armies of mercenaries, and they could only fund large armies when they controlled large amounts of land in England. Unless they captured and maintained a lot of land in England raiding there had little value, so the Baltic provided a much easier and cheaper way of increasing their wealth. However, the raiding went both ways, and Denmark was frequently being raided by the Baltic Slavs.[55] The raids were intense enough that they were gradually forcing the Danish nobles to stay on the defensive. This caused a dilemma as conducting raids throughout the Baltic while preventing enemy raids became increasingly vital. Second, trade in the Baltic was important for economic success, and the Danish nobles were in competition with both the Slavs and the Germans. Some of this competition stemmed from the highly desired amber that could be found in the Baltic.[56] Amber was a rare product, and the amber in the Baltic was the highest quality, so it provided considerable revenue. Also, five major rivers emptied into the Baltic, so trade routes were plentiful, but they were also important to control as Eric Christiansen stated, "For the river (the Vistula) was an economic artery, and the more of it a ruler controlled, the richer he got; the

[52] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 49
[53] Ibid. 26
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid. 27
[56] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 47

more he competed for power and wealth along its sources and tributaries, the more he was interested in the affairs of those who lived beyond its mouth."[57] More importantly, as the rivers became economically important, controlling the actions of all of the people involved became important, and neither the Slavs nor the Germans were accountable to the Danes.

The economic challenge was formidable, but a solution to this dilemma emerged in 1147 when the northern nobles were asked to go on a crusade to the Holy Lands. Rather than travel to the Holy Lands, the northern nobles requested to go fight the pagans in the Baltic. The Church complied and called for complete destruction or complete conversion of the pagans, and they forbade making peace with the pagans for tribute or payment.[58] The Church wanted a purelt religious expedition, but the chronicler Helmold observed shortly into the campaign that the Christian nobles realized they were hurting their own financial gain if they killed too many pagans or despoiled too much of the land.[59] He further stated,

> From that day, then, uncertainty of purpose began to seize the army and repeated truces to lighten the investment. As often as the Slavs were beaten in an engagement, the army was held back from pursuing the fugitives and from seizing the strongholds. Finally, when our men were weary, an agreement was made to the effect that the Slavs were to embrace Christianity and to release the Danes whom they held in captivity. … Thus, the grand expedition broke up with slight gain. The Slavs immediately afterwards became worse: they neither respected their baptism nor kept their hands from ravaging the Danes.[60]

Although the nobles claimed they fought to protect Christians they were clearly motivated by money. They were afraid to fight for the total conversion or total destruction the Church proposed because they wanted to protect their economic interests, and destroying the land or the

---

[57] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 11
[58] Bernard of Clairvaux, "Proclamations of Northern European Crusades," in *The Crusades*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt (University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), 269
[59] Helmold, "Helmold's Chronicle of the Slavs," *The Crusades*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, (University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), 272
[60] Ibid. 272.

pagans would hurt them economically. As a result the crusaders turned the expedition into essentially a large raid. They got booty, made a token effort to convert the pagans, and then went back home. As a result the clergy would later refine the crusading movement to prevent similar disasters.

The nobles' overt attempt to increase their wealth (as witnessed by Helmold) is almost completely gone in later sources, and that is because the economic motivations dwindled. Economic concerns of the Danish and German nobility lessened because land acquisition was not generally possible in the Baltic Crusades. First, conquered territories were divided between the Church and the local monastic order, the Swordbrothers, and the deal included all future conquests, so there was not much land an ambitious noble could legitimately claim.[61] Second, the nature of raiding changed. For centuries the people in the Baltic relied on small, open decked ships for transportation.[62] Although raiding was difficult with such vessels, it was equally difficult to defend one. All of that changed with the increased use of cogs because they were taller and much harder to assault.[63] As the pagans did not have an abundance of cogs, raiding cogs with their smaller ships became increasingly difficult. In one instance Henry of Livonia talked about how nine crusader cogs fought off 200 pagan ships.[64] When the number of cogs possessed by the Christian nations increased it became harder to attack them on the open sea. At the same time over land raids became increasingly common. As, A Christian community that closely bordered the pagan tribes was established when the crusaders conquered the Livs from 1198-1202, so raids and counter-raids increased in frequency and severity along the border,

[61] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 69-70
[62] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 15-16
[63] Cogs were larger, wider ships with a raised bow and stern. They had one center mast with a large sail for propulsion.
[64] *The Chronicle of Henry of* Livonia, 150

including the winter season (an impossible feat on the sea because it froe).[65] The most intense raiding occurred on the southern border of the Livonian frontier during the crusades.[66] Raiding and counter raiding essentially became part of the yearly routine of the border defense, so calling a crusade to counter pagan raiding parties was redundant and unnecessary.[67] Furthermore, the economy in the Baltic was stabilizing.[68] Through war and peace the pagan Lithuanians and the Germans continued to trade rather than raid when possible.[69] Establishing good trade relations was more economically viable than relying on raids, so raids as a primary means of economic enrichment diminished. It is important to note economic motivations did not disappear quickly (nor can one say they were ever completely eradicated). In 1195 Earl Birger, a minor Swedish noble, raided the Estonians for a few days after his crusade was swept off course, and he accepted tribute to leave.[70] He was so excited about his loot that he forgot to convert the pagans although it was part of the deal he made with them in addition to the tribute. However, the economic incentives rapidly diminished, and were no longer a major factor by the time the Teutonic Order took over the Baltic Crusades in 1230.

The final reason economic incentives waned was the increasing involvement on the part of the Church and the introduction of military orders to run the crusades. The Livonian crusade made it apparent a military monastic order would be needed in order to keep the new communities safe.[71] Secular armies were seasonal, undisciplined, and unreliable, so a permanent

---

[65] "The Organization of Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century" by William Urban covers this topic in detail, and Book Three in *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia* frequently discusses the nature of raiding.
[66] Urban, "The Organization of Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century," 525-526
[67] Hardwick, "The Knightly Class of Europe and the Lithuanian Crusades," discusses the annual Reisen. Reisen were essentially massive raids, and they attracted many nobles who wanted to fight for glory.
[68] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 142
[69] The notable exception was the southern portion of the Livonian frontier because the tribes there were still highly organized and militant.
[70] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 81
[71] Ibid, 81

force needed to be maintained.[72] In 1200 the abbot of the monastery in Treiden, Brother Theodoric, was concerned the pagans would overwhelm the Christian communities in Livonia, so he created a monastic order called the Swordbrothers.[73] The Swordbrothers adopted the same rules as the Knights Templars and were intended to protect the new community in Riga while Theodoric worked to expand the Christian community. Military monastic orders provided armies that were generally cheaper to train and more disciplined than their secular counterparts.[74] Although land granted to the monastic orders was lost from the tax base, raising an army through a monastic order was cheaper and more reliable than the alternative, so that alleviated some of the military burden from the Christian nobles. Furthermore, the nobles would not have to provide as many troops in future campaigns, so their economic burden lessened. However, the Swordbrothers were a small order, so their resources were constantly stretched thin. They relied on the tax incomes from their holdings in the Baltic to fund the defense, but complaints against the Swordbrothers came in quickly.[75] Both the Livs and the Letts complained that the Swordbrothers were mistreating their people and taking their property. In both cases the Swordbrothers were permitted to retain some of what they took (or were granted different property), but they had to give back some of it and pay the locals for the injustices.[76] This complicated their situation because they were a small order that already suffered from small recruitment numbers.[77] Because they had insufficient membership, they had to hire more mercenaries. However, they could not pay for all of the mercenaries without raising taxes, but

---

[72] Ibid.
[73] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 40. They were officially the Militia of Christ, but they quickly adopted Swordbrothers as a nickname. Henry's chronicle refers to them as the Militia, but secondary sources refer to them as the Swordbrothers, so I have gone with the more common name. Also, Brother Theodoric would eventually become the local bishop.
[74] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 65.
[75] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 125, 131.
[76] *Ibi.,* 125
[77] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 180-181.

the recent converts did not want to pay more taxes. As a result the only solution was to increase the tax base, and that meant expansion was necessary. Therefore, economic concerns shifted from the nobles to the Swordbrothers. As a result economic concerns persisted, but they did not affect as many people.

A wealthier, more powerful order would not have been so financially strained like the Swordbrothers, so why did Theodoric not bring in an established order? Theodoric chose not to bring in Knights Templars or Knights Hospitallers (more experienced and powerful order based in the Holy Lands) for a variety of reasons. The biggest concern for the existing orders was finances.[78] It made little financial sense for a military order based in the Holy Lands to spread its resources into the Baltic without being able to finance the expedition from the resources gained in the new theater. The Baltic region lacked an established economic base, and therefore the established orders were not interested in aiding in this endeavor. Fighting for Christ is difficult to do when one cannot finance the expedition. Furthermore, this would spread their manpower thinner across all of their fronts. A new order could concentrate solely in the Baltic, so its resources were not divided between two theaters. Creating a new order allowed Theodoric and Bishop Albert to address an immediate need of manpower cheaper and quicker than any other means. The new order's holdings would all be in the Baltic, so they could react and bring all of their forces to bear against pagan threats much quicker. Furthermore, the Baltic Crusades were still in their infancy, so their goals were not completely worked out. In the Holy Lands the goal was simple: maintain Jerusalem and a Christian state. In the Baltic they knew they wanted to convert the pagans, but leaders debated whether conversion or conquest was the best option.

[78] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 57.

Creating a monastic order provided an immediate boost to manpower to protect the recent converts while being more financially viable for Theodoric.

To limit the economic strains a powerful order was needed, but the powerful orders were focused on the Holy Lands. However, the moderately powerful and wealthy Teutonic Order was invited to crusade in the Baltic, and their involvement reduced the economic incentives to a minimum. The Teutonic Order was founded in 1190 but remained relatively small until Grand Master Hermann von Salza, a Hohenstaufen loyalist and advisor to Emperor Frederick II, took over in 1210. Hermann managed to build the order through efficient politicking. During the crusading campaign to Damietta in 1217 he was often looked to for advice and leadership because the Germans had contributed considerable resources to the campaign, and this allowed him to secure considerable donations and favors for the Order.[79] These donations enabled the order to grow, and they achieved a level of prosperity much greater than the Swordbrothers, so they were not as financially strained. Moreover, the Teutonic Order was granted more assets in the Baltic than the Swordbrothers ever acquired. Before the Teutonic Order committed troops to the Baltic they made a deal with Duke Conrad of Mosavia that granted them land, but they had deals with secular rulers fall through before.[80] Luckily for the Order, Hermann was on excellent terms with Frederick II and would continue to be so for many years. As a result he confirmed the Order's deal with Duke Conrad, and he went a step further by giving his approval of the deal in the Golden Bull of Rimini in 1226.[81] The Golden Bull is an ambiguous document, and the only specifics that are mentioned are the Order would be granted land in Culm, and it would hold the land free of service and exaction (it would be independent from the empire), collect taxes, tolls,

[79] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 25.
[80] Ibid. 35-36
[81] "The German Push to the East," in *The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed. James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughlin, Penguin Books, 1977, 424-426.

set up markets, administer justice, and coin money. Compared to the Swordbrothers the Order had considerable resources at their disposal. They controlled all of the land they conquered compared to one third of the land the Swordbrothers conquered, thus, they had a larger tax base.[82] Furthermore, they did not have to pay taxes to the Church whereas the Swordbrothers paid one fourth of the tithes they collected to the bishop as a sign of obedience.[83] In addition , the Order had a considerable number of estates outside of the Baltic.[84] Land that was won or lost on the frontier had very little impact on their economic situation, so expanding for economic reasons was not important. The Teutonic Order was financially more stable because they secured greater donations and had more financial assets both in and outside the Baltic.

The Order had much less economic motivation, but the natives still complained about them while they campaigned in the Baltic. The complaints against the Teutonic Order claimed they took too much property, but it would be wrong to assume they were economically motivated. The money the Order collected through taxes was used to maintain the defenses rather than further conquests. As Urban points out,

> The castles were financed by native taxes and gifts from Germany. Taxes were never sufficient, and varied from locality to locality. Tribes which had proven loyal for generations or whose obedience could not be guaranteed were taxed only by the Zins (cens), an amount equal to three bushels of grain per farmstead. The natives considered that a heavy but bearable tax. Other tribes paid the Zehnte (tithe), which was twice the other.[85]

Although they were a wealthy order they still hand to fund their defenses. In addition to maintaining the defenses, tax rates were used to encourage loyalty. The Order varied their tax levels to fit each locality, so a tribe that was really loyal or recently converted would have a much lower tax level. The taxes were meant to fund their defenses, but they also encouraged

---

[82] Ibid. 424-425
[83] Henry of Livonia, *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 70.
[84] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 84.
[85] William Urban, "The Organization of Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century."

loyalty because loyal tribes paid less in taxes. Their high tax levels served practical purposes rather than enriched the Order. Moreover, the Order's taxes were no more oppressive than what Christians in Germany faced.[86] Their economic policies also created a more stable economy similar to what existed in Germany.[87] Economic motivations had severely waned, and religious and political motivations were the primary causes for the ensuing crusades.

While economic and religious incentives were fluctuating in importance, political motivations remained a constant influence on the Baltic Crusades. The biggest factor that influenced the Baltic Crusades was the tenuous politics within the Holy Roman Empire because it provided the opportunity for competing factions to increase their power. The northern German nobles wanted to increase their power vis à vis the emperor, and the Hohenstaufen emperors wanted to increase their influence over the northern nobles by creating a base of power in Italy. The Teutonic Order took advantage of the ongoing struggle in Imperial Germany to pursue a base of power and recruitment center in Europe.

The power struggle in Germany was facilitated by the volatile power structure in Imperial Germany. Unlike French and English lords, the German princes got their power through allodial lands instead of fiefs.[88] This meant the land was not parceled out by emperor, so the princes were not technically his vassals. Land was completely controlled by the local families without restriction, and as a result it was much harder for the emperor to control the nobility in the Holy Roman Empire than it was for the English. Furthermore, each emperor usually had to create a base of power around his ancestral, allodial lands before exerting control over the

[86] William Urban, "The Prussian-Lithuanian Frontier of 1242," *Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1975). The Order implemented the exact economic system that was used in Germany, so it was no more oppressive than what most people endured at the time.
[87] The Germans had superior farming methods than the pagans at this time, so their harvests were more reliable.
[88] Alfred Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany: 1056-1273*. Trans. Helga Braun and Richard Mortimer. Oxford University Press, 1988, 157-158.

princes. The emperor, much like the princes, was very powerful in his home territory because he and his family had complete control over it for years. However, royal influence grew increasingly weaker as the emperor moved away from his native home because the diplomatic relations were usually not as strong between distant provinces. In addition, the Empire stretched from Burgundy to Germany to Italy, so it was hard to control regardless of the power structure. Prior to the Wendish Crusade, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa was attempting to make his ancestral lands of Swabia the center of his empire, so he left the northern princes to their own devices.[89] Moreover Barbarossa sought to strengthen his control over Italy which would enable him to use the wealthy lands there to better control the German nobility; something which his predecessors had failed to do.[90]

The absence of Barbarossa from northern Germany exacerbated the political tensions in the north, and that had a major impact on the Baltic Crusades. The German nobles took every opportunity they could to increase their power, and the northern nobles in particular noticed their independence and power increased in Barbarossa's absence.[91] When the northern nobles attacked the Wends in the early twelfth century it was in large part to continue building their power.[92] Although they were requested to attack by the local bishop, it was not yet a religious campaign. The nobles were fighting to expand their own territory and gain booty rather than convert the pagans, so they were wars of conquest rather than conversion. Barbarossa's cousin and main rival from the Welf family, Duke Henry the Lion of Saxony, was particularly successful at using these campaigns to spread his influence and increase his tax base by establishing towns and trade

[89] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 1.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid. 2-3.
[92] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 54

on the frontier.[93] Like Henry the Lion, the northern nobles were utilized Barbarossa's policies for their own gain. As Imperial armies were no longer present in the northern provinces, Barbarossa could not control the nobles or quell unrest the pagan tribes caused, and as a result, this made the frontier less safe for missionaries and merchants. They responded by asking the German nobles for assistance.[94] The northern princes provided escorts for the rapidly expanding trade networks, so they gained from all of the increased taxes, tolls, and court fines from their expanding jurisdictions. Furthermore, they were able to build more castles and increase their militaries to unprecedented levels. Clerical calls for aid against the Wendish encouraged the conquest of pagan lands and thereby increased their tax base and wealth. Moreover, when the bishop of Magdeburg appealed to the northern nobles to intervene, Henry the Lion was one of the first to respond, and he gained immense power and influence as a result.[95] He was able to create a powerful state that sponsored colonization, fostered trade, and ultimately rivaled Frederick Barbarossa's.[96] Henry the Lion gained so much power he was able to leave on a Crusade to the Holy Lands in 1171. There was a lot to be gained by an ambitious noble in northern Germany, and Henry the Lion provided a model for the others. Barbarossa's campaigns in Italy further exacerbated the problems in northern Germany because they threatened the papacy. In an attempt to undermine Barbarossa's campaigns in Italy the papacy often sponsored rebellious factions in Germany.[97] In effect this served to destabilize the region even more, and that helped contribute to the Baltic Crusades. The absence of Barbarossa provided an opportunity for the northern nobles to increase their power, and they utilized every means they could to do so, and that contributed to the start of the Baltic Crusades.

---

[93] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 5.
[94] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 51-53.
[95] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 5.
[96] Ibid. 9.
[97] Ibid. 9.

The Wendish Crusade was called less than forty years after the bishop of Magdeburg asked the northern nobles to intervene against the hostile pagans, and this campaign was similar in how it was conducted. It essentially turned into a raid that ended in large part because the German and Danish nobles could not decide how to divide the spoils.[98] The noble crusaders had little interest in converting the pagans. It took time and constant urging from the popes and local clergy before the Baltic Crusades became more religious in their orientation.[99] Furthermore, following the 1147 Wendish Crusade, heightened tensions between the pagans and the Christian kingdoms, bred more violence from the pagans including assassination attempts.[100] In addition to the increased violence, the pagans developed a reputation of being deceptive, and this exacerbated the political problems between the pagan tribes and the Christian kingdoms.[101] The weak central government in the Holy Roman Empire allowed the northern nobles to become increasingly ambitious. The political ambitions of the German and Danish nobles in the early twelfth century in conjunction with the tumultuous politics of the Holy Roman Empire sparked a series of events that would eventually lead to the Teutonic Order taking over the crusades in the Baltic.

The Teutonic Order was established to care for the German crusaders in the Holy Lands, but the root cause for their creation was the competition between the Welfs and the Hohenstaufens in the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick Barbarossa was a Hohenstaufen ruler, and in 1188 he exiled his main opponent, Henry the Lion. After resolving that conflict he went on the Third Crusade with the French and English contingents, but he drowned on the way. As a result

---

[98] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 2-3.
[99] Ibid. 111.
[100] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 29
[101] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 29, 37, and 191 are just a few examples of the actions the Christians found treacherous and how it affected their relations.

King Richard the Lionheart of England, a Welf loyalist, took over command of the crusade. Many members of the German contingent immediately left to elect the new Holy Roman Emperor, but those who stayed were subject to frequent humiliation at Richard's hands.[102] The psychological humiliation was compounded by the lack of medical care, and these factors led to the foundation of the Teutonic Order.

Shortly after the Order was founded its leaders wanted to secure a strong base of power, and this desire got them involved in the Baltic Crusades. In 1217 King Andrew II of Hungary invited the Order to combat the pagan Cumans, so he could go on a crusade in the Holy Lands. This campaign appealed to the Teutonic Order because they were promised land in Transylvania in addition to immunities from taxes and duties.[103] They were granted the right to exercise justice, establish trade markets, and claim taxes and tolls. King Andrew II retained his right to coin money and claim half of any precious metal that may be found there. This grant provided the base of power and recruitment the Teutonic Order desired. The Order agreed to the terms, and while Hermann von Salza and King Andrew II set out on the failed Fifth Crusade the Order initiated their operations against the pagans.[104] Ultimately the Order was too successful. They easily drove the Cumans away and rapidly expanded their territory and built castles to defend their new holdings.[105] The Hungarian nobles wanted the Order removed, and when they eventually got King Andrew's approval the Order was driven out less than a decade after arriving.[106] Getting involved in Hungary had several effects that shaped the Order and the Baltic Crusades. First, the Teutonic Order now had to strike a balance between crusading in Europe,

[102] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 11-12.
[103] Ibid. 33.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid. 34
[106] Ibid. 35-36

crusading in the Holy lands, as well as negotiating imperial business throughout Europe.[107] Second, although some of the details of their agreement with King Andrew II are unknown, it is evident they lost everything they had been promised. Losing all of the land they were granted in Hungary made them more wary of the deals they made, and they would get later deals confirmed by both the pope and the secular rulers. Finally, the experience in Hungary encouraged the Teutonic Order to rely on Frederick II for political support, and this support is ultimately what got the Order involved in the Baltic.

The Order's attainment of a base of power was only possible through Hermann von Salza's political connection to Emperor Frederick II. This connection enabled the Teutonic Order to gain power, influence, and eventually land in the Baltic. The Golden Bull of Rimini enabled the Order to establish a power base independent of imperial rule, and it exceeded the agreement they had made with King Andrew II in Hungary. Prussia was a logical place for their base of power and recruitment center. It was near Germany in addition to a pagan frontier they could expand into. Moreover, the Teutonic Order's main source of recruits came from Thuringia, and it was close to Prussia.[108] This suggests the Order's motivation for fighting the Baltic pagans was to establish a power base. Furthermore, the Teutonic Order's longtime political and military support of Frederick II made him more likely to support them. Frederick II had to choose his friends wisely and reward them appropriately due to the fractured nature of the Holy Roman Empire. One example of The Order's loyalty was the failed campaign to Damietta in 1221. Many crusaders blamed Frederick II because he did not honor his vows, but Hermann did not blame

[107] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 28.
[108] Maria Starnawska, "The Teutonic Order Confronts Mongols and Turks," in *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*, ed. Malcolm Barber, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994), 424.

him.[109] One reason for this was loyalty to the Hohenstaufens, but Frederick II also had a legitimate reason for delaying his vows. Crusades to the Holy Lands usually departed when the leaders had resolved all of their domestic disputes.[110] Frederick II was almost constantly in conflict, so he continued to delay his crusading vows. Many other rulers made similar requests, so he was not asking for anything uncommon. However, he did ask for considerably more delays than was common, and he was still negotiating and delaying in 1220 over imperial and papal claims, which led to his excommunication.[111] Despite this, he left on crusade in 1226, and Hermann and the Teutonic Order provided a contingent of knights for his disposal. The most immediate impact of Herman's and the Teutonic Order's loyalty was that they were generously rewarded when Frederick II reclaimed Jerusalem.[112] Rewards for loyalty would continue to be granted to the Teutonic Order in the years to come, so the Teutonic Order benefited significantly from their friendship with Frederick II.[113] Good relations with Frederick II helped get them involved in the Baltic Crusades, but the politics of the Swordbrothers were reason the Teutonic Order took control of the Baltic Crusades.

When the Teutonic Order entered the Baltic Crusades it created two competing crusades. The Swordbrothers were fighting the Estonians while the Teutonic Knights were fighting the Prussians further south. This diverted resources from both fronts, and it was exacerbated by the politics of Imperial Germany. During periods of internal strife more crusading armies arrived from Germany as nobles wanted their land protected by the crusading privileges.[114] As soon as the civil wars ended the German nobles were content to stay at home rather than crusade, so the

[109] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 25.
[110] Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 77-78.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 27.
[113] Nicholas Morton, "The Teutonic Knights During the Ibelin-Lombard Conflict," in *The Military Orders, Volume 4: On Land and by Sea,* ed. Judi Upton-Ward, (Aldershot Ashgate, 2008), 141.
[114] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 179-180.

number of crusaders flowing to the frontlines constantly fluctuated. However, the competition between the two fronts ended when the Teutonic Order took over the entire crusading movement in the Baltic, and the Order could send crusading armies where they were most needed in the Baltic. They took control of the crusades for several reasons. First, the Swordbrothers' actions were causing a lot of tension in the Baltic, so they were becoming a political liability. On several occasions the Swordbrothers attempted to take land from the Danes and the clergy to extend their borders, and this drew them into a war with the papal legate.[115] They had been in several conflicts because they wanted more power, and by 1230 their bad reputation was sealed.[116] Pope Gregory IX took action against the Swordbrothers and declared the Teutonic Order was the papacy's partner in the Baltic Crusades in 1234.[117] This put more pressure on the Swordbrothers, but it also enhanced the reputation of the Teutonic Order and gave them more influence in the Baltic. Second, after the Swordbrothers increased their taxes on the native population to finance their wars every converted tribe wanted them gone. A Christian army increased this pressure even more by invading the Swordbrothers' possessions. The master of the Swordbrothers formally requested his knights be admitted into the Teutonic Order, but they were refused admission because they caused so much trouble. Prompted by their remaining allies, they allowed a crusading army to convince them to launch an ill-advised attack on Lithuania, during which the Swordbrothers were annihilated in the Battle of Saule.[118] They lost over fifty knights, and they were no longer an effective fighting force. Their political ambitions outstretched their practical abilities. The Teutonic Order officially absorbed the remaining Swordbrothers and took over all of their duties in Livonia. Political policies of the Swordbrothers were instrumental in

[115] Richard Spence, "Pope Gregory IX and the Crusade on the Baltic." *The Catholic Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1983): 4.
[116] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, 102.
[117] Spence, "Pope Gregory IX," 11.
[118] Urban, *The Baltic Crusades*, 184-185.

making the Teutonic Order the leader of the Baltic Crusades, and the Teutonic Order would drive the Baltic Crusades into the fifteenth century.

Religious and missionary zeal contributed to the start of the Baltic Crusades, and it would eventually be one of the dominate causes for the crusades. For the most part, peaceful missions to convert the pagans were encouraged, but the Magdeburg diocese appealed to western nobles to take lands from the Wends as early as 1108 to pacify the pagans. Although most of the nobles were still fighting for economic and political reasons, it is evident the Church wanted all of the crusades to be for religious reasons. Pope Eugenius called the Second Crusade to reclaim Jerusalem in December 1145, and the Pope wanted every Christian kingdom to send a contingent to the Holy Lands. However, the Spanish and Saxon nobles were requested to fight the Muslims in Spain and the heathen Wends respectively.[119] Bernard of Clairvaux convinced Pope Eugenius to authorize the Baltic Crusades after the northern nobles approached him and requested to crusade against the pagans. Bernard clearly felt God was moving to protect Christendom and convert heathens through the crusading movement. Bernard was further convinced the nobles' zeal was genuine, and he argued God moved the nobles to drive paganism out of Christian lands.[120] He further argued converting the pagans would do more harm to Satan than converting all of Israel.[121] Bernard's conviction that the pagans needed to be fought to preserve Christendom led to key institutional and ideological shifts that would turn the Baltic Crusades into highly religious movements.

The Baltic Crusades underwent some crucial institutional and ideological changes that transformed them from a religious excuse to meet economic and political ends to a religious

[119] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 53
[120] Bernard of Clairvaux, "Proclamation of the Northern Crusades," 268-269.
[121] Ibid.

mission. When Pope Eugenius and his successors granted permission for the German nobles to crusade against the pagans they expanded the theological understanding of just warfare. Augustine of Hippo argued wars were righteous when they were conducted in obedience to God and to protect the public, and all peaceful means were exhausted. The true evils in war were love of violence and lusting for power.[122] More importantly a war was just when the monarch demanded war.[123] The Baltic Crusades expanded this concept because now the Church and monastic orders had the right to initiate just wars rather than the nobility. Furthermore, any war waged against the pagans was a just war.[124] Fighting a just war by defending the faith and ethnic Germans became a key component in the succeeding Baltic Crusades. This concept of just war and the religious threat of paganism became a key foundation for why the Christian nobles crusaded against the pagans, and it became a major justification for the Church and monastic orders.

The rise of forced conversions was even more important of an ideological development. In the Wendish Crusade it was the first time forced conversions were legitimized by the Church.[125] Conquest and conversion had been related before, but the crusade against the Wends was the first campaign that the Church sponsored forced conversions.[126] It did not take long for forced conversions to be readily accepted by the Church, and eliminating a hostile tribe through

---

[122] Augustine of Hippo, "Augustine of Hippo on the Just War," *The Crusades*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 7-8. University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010.
[123] Ibid. 8
[124] Urban, *The Teutonic Knights*, 157
[125] Haverkamp, *Medieval Germany 1056-1273*, 195.
[126] Forced conversions were previously espoused by the clergy or implemented by the nobility without a mutual agreement. Emperor Theodosius Christianized the Roman Empire starting in 392 through forced conversions. This trend continued under Charlemagne, and pagans who refused to convert were executed. More on this topic can be found in Lawrence Duggan. "For Force is not of God? Compulsion and Conversion from Yahweh to Charlemagne." In *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*. Ed. James Muldoon, (1997): 49-62.

conversion became an accepted tactic.[127]In addition to sanctioning forced conversions, the Church put the crusades in the Baltic on equal footing as the crusades in the Holy Land with the pope issued the bull *Non parum animus noster* in 1171.[128] This bull granted the same religious rewards for the crusaders in the Baltic as those in the Holy Land, such as full remission of sins.

The rising influence of forced conversions is evident in the Livonian Crusade as enforcing conversions became accepted. Similar to the Wendish Crusade there was an initial, peaceful missionary effort conducted by the local bishop, Meinhard, and his assistant Brother Theodoric. However, a novel (yet recurring) problem presented itself. The natives in Uexküll promised to convert to Christianity if they were provided with a stone fort to protect themselves from Lithuanian raids.[129] Bishop Meinhard agreed and even sponsored a portion of the fort with his own money. However, when the fort was built the Livonians reneged on their promise to be baptized, and those who were already baptized relapsed.[130] The neighboring pagans in Holm cheated Meinhard in a similar manner.[131] In addition, the pagans made every effort to prevent Meinhard (including an assassination attempt) from leaving the area and informing the pope.[132] Eventually his assistant, Brother Theodoric, escaped and presented their dilemma to the church,

> "When the supreme pontiff heard how many had been baptized, he thought that they should not be deserted and decreed that they ought to be forced to observe the faith which they had freely promised. He granted, indeed, the remission of all sins to all those who would take the cross and go to restore that newly founded church.[133]"

[127] Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, "Pope Honorius III and Mission and Crusades in the Baltic Region," In *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*. Ed. Alan V. Murray, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009),119.
[128] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* 71.
[129] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, 26.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid. 27.
[132] This is brought up on pages 28-29 of Henry's chronicle. It is interesting that the Livs already feared, correctly of course, that a Christian army would be brought to bear upon them if their actions were made known.
[133] Ibid. 30.

The Church saw they had many new "converts," and they wanted to retain what this new addition to the Church. They already had a church and priests in the area, and they wanted to send a crusade there to enforce the pagans' conversion. This was a new reason to start a crusade as previously every crusade was either an attempt to drive Muslims out of Christian territories or to protect Christians. Pagans converted and reneged during the Wendish Crusade, but the Church did not enforce their conversions, so this was a new approach. The false conversion also altered Christians' trust of pagan promises. For example, in 1200 Bishop Albert did not believe the pagans when they said they wanted peace.[134] This attitude would persist throughout the Baltic Crusades, and a pattern of enforcing conversions and not trusting peace agreements emerged.

The major ideological shifts coupled with major institutional shifts. The most important institutional change that took place was the introduction of military orders as a means of defense against pagan incursions rather than using them to fight against Muslims. Relying on a military a monastic order instead of crusaders or imperial armies for protection had many benefits. The most obvious benefits have already been explored in detail: they were cheaper and provided more consistent protection compared to the seasonal crusader armies. Their ranks relied on nobles members and this provided a constant presence of professional troops which deterred attackers. Moreover, a military monastic order in the Baltic provided both spiritual and combat leadership. The Baltic Crusades were disjointed during the later twelfth century. German and Danish knights did not know the lay of the land or have common goals. A monastic order based on the frontier could scout out enemy weaknesses throughout the year and use the crusading armies that came in the summer to exploit them. From a religious standpoint monastic orders were, theoretically, more likely to share the same ideals as the bishop. An order founded to

[134] Ibid, 37.

protect Christianity would be much less likely to succumb to bribery than noble crusaders. For example, during the Livonian Crusade nobles granted the pagans truces in return for tribute.[135] This hindered the conversion process in the Baltic, and it frustrated the clergy.[136] The Teutonic Order implemented aggressive campaigns, but they stopped when it appeared the pagans were about to convert.[137] Bringing in a militant monastic order was a crucial step in the evolution of the Baltic Crusades because it helped center the campaigns around religion.

Military orders took over the bulk of the defense for the remainder of the northern crusades in 1202, under the Swordbrothers, and in 1230, when the Teutonic Order took over the campaigns. The rise of military orders reflects the changing religious values in the Christian kingdoms. Traditional knighthood came into question, and Bernard of Clairvaux praised the Templars' new concept of knighthood.[138] Knights in military orders were ideal knights that fought for Christ, and they served as a bastion of defense against the heathens. Despite these general changes, monastic orders varied in their habits and values, and the differences between the Swordbrothers and the Teutonic Knights reflect the different religious causes for the crusade. First, the Swordbrothers were created specifically to protect and expand Christendom in the Baltic during the Livonian Crusade, so unlike the Teutonic Order their main purpose was the defense of the Baltic.[139] Second, the Swordbrothers were based completely on the Rule of the Templars while the Teutonic Knights used both the Templar and Hospitaller Rules, so

---

[135] Ibid. 30.
[136] Helmold, "Helmold's Chronicle of the Slavs," 270. The priest Helmold was frustrated the expedition was for nothing as the pagans just reverted back to their previous lifestyle as soon as the knights left.
[137] Urban, "The Prussian-Lithuanian Frontier of 1242."
[138] Bernard of Clairvaux, "Bernard of Clairvaux: *In Praise of the New Knighthood*," in *The Crusdes*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, (University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010), 197-198.
[139] *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia,* 40. The Livonian Crusade occurred 1198-1209.

ideologically the two orders were different.[140] The Swordbrothers followed a military-monastic model, and although they valued many of the same ideals as the Teutonic Order (such as voluntary poverty), military-monastic orders placed a greater emphasis on improving oneself through prayer and meditation.[141] Monks in the Swordbrothers were focused much more on waging war because it was how they reconciled remaining in isolation and trying to improve themselves. On the other hand the Teutonic Order followed the military-hospitaller model.[142] A hospitaller's goal was to help the poor and needy, and fulfilling that goal was how they justified going to war. Therefore, from a basic ideological point of view the Teutonic Order did not benefit from fighting in the Baltic Crusades as much as the Swordbrothers.

Protecting and spreading Christianity remained the main goals of the Teutonic Order throughout the thirteenth century, and it is evident in how they justified and conducted their campaigns. Although their main goal was the Holy Lands, fighting the pagans still fulfilled their religious duty because it could be classified as a just war.[143] The Prussians were devastating the lands of the Christian Duke Conrad of Masovia.[144] Moreover, they were killing the priests and other noncombatants. Therefore, fighting the pagans was part of their duty as members of the new knighthood. The Prussians' actions gave the Teutonic Order a religious motivation to fight in the Baltic, and the destruction of the Swordbrothers in 1236 gave the Teutonic Order complete control of the Livonian frontier in addition to their duties in Prussia. This gave the Order more responsibilities, but they still embraced their religious motivations for crusading. Although the

[140] James W. Brodman, "Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders," *The Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (July 2001): 388.
[141] Ibid. 398.
[142] Ibid. 397.
[143] "The German Push to the East," 422-423
[144] Ibid.

Order was granted the right to take pagan lands, they relinquished land on several occasions.[145] When the pagan king Mindaugas converted in 1251 they stopped their attacks on his land and vacated their claim.[146] Furthermore, when the Order had practically defeated the Samitians in 1257 they still granted them a two year truce in the hope that they could convert them without further bloodshed.[147] Also, the Teutonic Order maintained their garrison in Acre until the city was lost in 1291; and it was not until 1309 that the Teutonic Order moved their headquarters from Venice where the grand master was conducting wars against the Muslims to Marienburg in Prussia.[148] This shows that the Teutonic Order focused on protecting Christendom even when they did not have a chance of winning. They kept sending troops to the Holy Lands and planned campaigns there until it was impossible to win, and then they focused completely on converting the pagans in the Baltic. This attitude reflected the view of the Church, and it reinforces the Teutonic Order was motivated by religious concerns.

The increasing religious emphasis ultimately started being demonstrated by the secular rulers. Early evidence of a religious desire to convert pagans in the Baltic is revealed in the Golden Bull of Rimini that was declared in 1226. The Golden Bull states Grand Master Hermann fervently wanted this land to promote the work of Christ.[149] In addition, it says "trusting also in the wisdom of this master (Hermann), a man mighty in word and deed, who will take up the matter forcefully with his Brothers and carry through the conquest manfully, not abandoning it as many did before him, who wasted so much time in this undertaking for nothing."[150] The Golden Bull illustrates the increasing religious pressure on rulers to spread Christianity. It was Frederick

[145] Urban, "The Prussian-Lithuanian Frontier of 1242."
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Elst, "Chivalry, Crusade," 294.
[149] "The German Push to the East," 424
[150] Ibid. 425

II's duty to protect Christendom, and the Bull reflects that when it stated, "Just as He created the Holy Roman Empire for the preaching of the gospel, so likewise we must turn our care and attention to the conquest and conversion of the heathen."[151] The language reflects a longstanding notion of a king's responsibility to be a protector of the faith. Also, the Golden Bull suggests Frederick II either wanted Christianity to spread, and he wanted to put people in charge that would promote that goal, or the religious pressure was so intense that he felt obligated. Regardless, it demonstrates the increasing focus on religious reasons for crusading. Some of the Order's religious motivations are revealed in the Golden Bull of Rimini, but the increasing pressure on the nobility is even more prevalent. The Baltic Crusades gradually transformed into a more religiously motivated movement.

The Baltic Crusades were complex phenomena, and they reflected the dynamic culture and values in the Baltic. From the First Crusade in 1096 to the rise of the Baltic Crusade as the main crusading movement in 1309 the crusades were caused by the changing values Christians had. An emerging ethos combined with economic and political pressures caused the first crusade against the Wends in 1147. As the Baltic Crusades progressed economic concerns gradually waned, and religious concerns steadily took their place as causes for going on crusades. Political motivations remained prevalent throughout the crusades, and that was a result of the tumultuous politics of the Holy Roman Empire. Imperial politics fueled every aspect of the Baltic Crusades from start to finish. Barbarossa's policies destabilized the region which allowed the northern nobles to increase their power. The ensuing conflicts between the northern nobles and the emperor increased need for military orders in the region, and they were an indirect cause of the Teutonic Order's formation in the Holy Lands. Ultimately the lack of an imperial presence in the

[151] Ibid. 424

Baltic to quell the Swordbrothers and Frederick II's support of the Teutonic Order helped the Order gain power and take control of the Baltic Crusades.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Timeline of Events[152]

1096-9	First Crusade to Jerusalem.
1108	Appeal for war in Magdeburg diocese.
1129-36	Rule of the Knights Templars written.
1139-43	Conquest of Wagria and Polabia by the Saxons.
1147	First crusade against the Baltic Slavs.
1164	Subjugation of Abotrites.
1171	Alexander III authorizes crusade against east-Baltic pagans.
1181	Fall of Duke Henry the Lion.
1188	First mission to the Livs
1190	Teutonic Order founded in the Holy Lands.
1198	Innocent III authorizes Livonian Crusade.
1200	Bishop Albert authorizes creation of the Swordbrothers.
1200-9	Conquest of the Livs and Letts.
1217	Failed crusade in Damietta, Teutonic Order invited to fight in Hungary, Honorius III authorizes crusade against the Prussians.
1226	Bull of Rimini grants Prussia to Teutonic Order.
1230	Gregory IX authorizes Teutonic Order to combat the Prussians.
1231-40	Western Prussians conquered.
1254-6	Conquest of Samland.
1290	Conquest of Semigallia by Teutonic Order.

[152] Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades,* ix-x.

1291 Fall of Acre.

1309 Headquarters of Teutonic Knights moved to Marienburg.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Augustine of Hippo. "Augustine of Hippo on the Just War." In *The Crusades*. ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 7-9. University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010.

Bernard of Clairvaux. "Bernard of Clairvaux: *In Praise of the New Knighthood*," In *The Crusdes*, ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 197-199. University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010.

Bernard of Clairvaux, "Proclamations of Northern European Crusades." In *The Crusades*. ed. S. J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 268-270. University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2010.

"A Plea for the Reform of Germany." In *The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed. James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughlin, 311-318. Penguin Books, 1977.

Du Bois, Pierre. "The Recovery of the Holy Land: A Plan of Action and a Scheme for Reform." In *The Portable Medieval Reader*. ed. James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughin, 290-302. Penguin Books, 1997.

Helmold, "Helmold's Chronicle of the Slavs." In *The Crusades*, ed. S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 270-272. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

------ "The Conversion and subjugation of the Slavs." In *The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed. James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughlin, 415-421. Penguin Books, 1977.

Lettus, Henricus. *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, trans. James A. Brundage. New York, Columbia University Press, 2003.

"The German Push to the East." In *The Portable Medieval Reader*, ed. James Bruce and Mary Martin McLaughlin, 421-429. Penguin Books, 1977.

The Rule and Statutes of the Teutonic Knights, trans. Indrikis Sterns. ORB Online Encyclopedia, http://www.the-orb.net/encyclop/religion/monastic/tk_rule.html.

Jeroschin von, Nikolaus, *Nikolaus von Jeroschin on the Prussian Crusades*. In *The Crusades*, ed. S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt, 280-284. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Secondary Sources:

Brodman, James W. "Rule and Identity: The Case of the Military Orders." *The Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (July 2001): 383-400.

Christiansen, Eric. *The Northern Crusades*. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1997.

Duggan, Lawrence. "For Force is not of God? Compulsion and Conversion from Yahweh to Charlemagne." In *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages.* Ed. James Muldoon, (1997): 49-62.

Dygo, Marian. "The German empire and the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order in the light of the Golden Bull of Rimini," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 61 (1990): 33-61.

Forey, A.J. "The Military Orders and Holy War against Christians in the Thirteenth Century." *The English Historical Review* 104, no. 410 (January 1989): 1-24.

Hardwick, Paul. "The Knightly Class of Europe and the Lithuanian Crusades." *Medieval Life: A New Magazine of the Middle Ages* 6, (1997): 26-29.

Haverkamp, Alfred. *Medieval Germany 1056-1273*. Trans. Helga Braun and Richard Mortimer. Oxford University Press, 1988.

Hiestand, Rudolf. "Some Reflections on the Impact of the Papacy on the Crusader States and the Military Orders in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries." In *The Crusades and the Military Orders, Expanding Frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity*, ed. Zsolt Hunyadi and Jozsef Laszlovszky, 3-20. Budapest: Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, 2001.

Kasekamp, Andres. "Characteristics of Warfare in the Times of Henry of Livonia and Balthasar Russow," *Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1990): 27-38.

Kallikorm, Kadri, "The Conflict Between the Teutonic Order and the Church in Late Thirteenth- Early Fourteenth-Century Livonia: Views from both Sides and Outside (a Progress Report)," *ISHA Journal: Publication Series of the International Students of History Association* 2, (1994): 63-67.

Kiaupa, Zigmantas. "The Road of a Thousand Years." *Lituanus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences* 55 no. 3 (Fall 2009).

Kļaviņš, Kaspars. "The Ideology of Christianity and Pagan Practice among the Teutonic Knights: The Case of the Baltic Crusades." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 37 no. 3 (2006): 260-276.

Militzer, Klaus, "From the Holy Land to Prussia: the Teutonic Knights between Emperors and Popes and Their Policies Until 1309." In *Mendicants, Military Orders, and Regionalism in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Jürgen Sarnowsky, 71-81. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

------ "The Recruitment of Brethren for the Teutonic Order in Livonia, 1237-1562," in *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*. Ed. Malcolm Barber, 270-277. Aldershot: Variorum, 1994.

Morton, Nicholas. "The Teutonic Knights During the Ibelin-Lombard Conflict." In *The Military Orders, Volume 4: On Land and by Sea*, Ed. Judi Upton-Ward, 139-143. Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008.

Mazeika, Rasa J. "Violent Victims? Surprising Aspects of the Just War Theory in the Chronicle of Peter von Dusburg." In *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*. Ed. Alan V. Murray, 123-137. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Nielsen, Torben K. "Sterile Monsters? Russians and the Orthodox Church in the Chronicles of Henry of Livonia." In *The Clash of Cultures on the Medieval Baltic Frontier*. Ed. Alan V. Murray, 227-252. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Powell, James M. *Anatomy of a Crusade*. Philadelphia, 1986.

------ "Frederick II, the Hohenstaufen, and the Teutonic Order in the Kingdom of Sicily." In *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*. Ed. Malcolm Barber, 236-244. Aldershot: Variorum, 1994.

Sarnowsky, Jürgen, "The Teutonic Order Confronts Mongols and Turks." In *The Military Orders: Fighting for the Faith and Caring for the Sick*. Ed. Malcolm Barber, 253-262. Aldershot: Variorum, 1994.

Spence, Richard, "Pope Gregory IX and the Crusade on the Baltic." *The Catholic Historical Review* 69, no. 1 (1983): 1-19.

Starnawska, Maria, "Military Orders and the Beginning of the Crusades in Prussia," in *The Crusades and the Military Orders, Expanding Frontiers of medieval Latin Christianity*, ed. Zsolt Hunyadi and Jozsef Laszlovszky, 417-428. Budapest: Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, 2001.

Turnbull, Stephen. "The Teutonic Knights' Battle for Riga," *Medieval History Magazine* 6, (2004): 56-63.

Urban, William. *The Baltic Crusade*. Chicago, 1994.

------ "The Diplomacy of the Teutonic Knights at the Curia." *Journal of Baltic Studies* 9 no.2 (1978): 116-128.

------ "The Organization of Defense of the Livonian Frontier in the Thirteenth Century." *Speculem* 48, no. 3 (July 1973): 525-532.

------ "The Prussian-Lithuanian Frontier of 1242," *Lituanus: The Lithuanian Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1975): 5-18.

------ *The Teutonic Knights: A Military History*. South Yorkshire: Pen &Sword Books Ltd., 2011.

------ "Victims of the Baltic Crusade" Accessed February 6, 2013. http://department.monm.edu/history/urban/articles/VictimsBalticCrusade.htm.

Vander Elst, Stefan, "Chivalry, Crusade, and Romance on the Baltic Frontier." *Mediaeval Studies* 73, (2012): 287-328.